

WHY NOT THE BEST?
NCPA TASK FORCE ON EDUCATION:
CERTIFICATION OF TEXAS TEACHERS

Dr. Cherie Clodfelter
Chairman, Dept. of
Education
University of Dallas

Dr. Thomas Fomby
Associate Professor of
Economics
Southern Methodist
University

Dr. Phillip Porter
Assistant Professor of
Economics
Southern Methodist
University

Dr. John Goodman
Associate Professor of
Economics and Management
University of Dallas

Dr. Gerald Scully
Professor of Economics
Southern Methodist
University

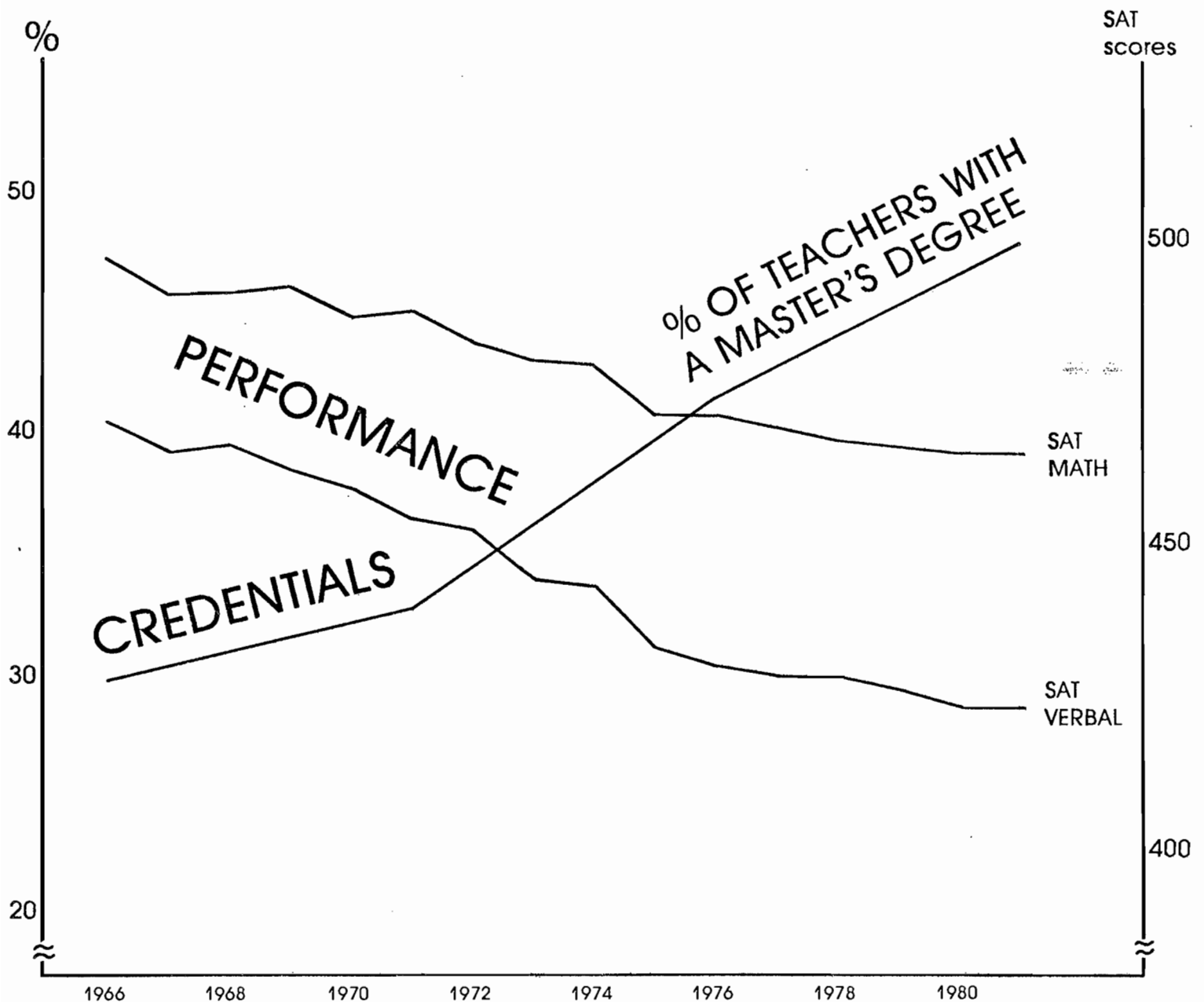
Dr. Robert Perry
Associate Professor of
Finance
University of Dallas

Dr. John Sommer
Associate Professor of
Political Economy
University of Texas
at Dallas

This report is one in a series of reports being released by the NCPA Task Force on Education.

Note: Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of the National Center for Policy Analysis or as an attempt to aid or hinder passage of any bill before Congress or before any state legislature.

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS CREDENTIALS VS. PERFORMANCE



SOURCE: NATIONAL CENTER FOR POLICY ANALYSIS
COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD
NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

WHY NOT THE BEST?

A proposal currently before the Texas State Board of Education threatens to do great harm to the school children of Texas.¹ On the surface, the proposal appears to upgrade the quality of instruction in the public schools by insuring that those who teach there meet higher standards of certification. In fact, the proposal will do just the opposite. It will keep some of the very best potential teachers out of the classroom and perpetuate a system which encourages and rewards mediocrity.

Ironically, this proposal comes at a time when many other states are considering innovative ways of circumventing the certification bureaucracy in order to allow potentially good teachers to teach. The proposal calls for Texas to raise the barriers to entry into the teaching profession; to make the journey to become a teacher less exciting, less rewarding and more ponderous than ever before; to ensure that all but the dullest, the slowest and the least imaginative of college students bypass teaching for some other career.

The central features of the proposal do not reflect the publicly expressed desires of parents and school children. They instead represent the wishes of the education bureaucracy. Perhaps this is the reason why the proposal reeks of the mentality of the medieval guild system. Its approach is one of rules and regulations rather than individual choice. It favors monopoly over competition. It substitutes the judgement of bureaucrats for the judgement of the marketplace. Above all, the proposal seeks more power and authority for a teacher education and certification system which is failing us now and will continue to fail us in the future.

Under the current system of teacher education, students in most departments of education are involved in programs described by the people who teach in them as rigid, stale and routine. If the Commission's proposal is adopted, the education curriculum will become even more rigid, more stale and routine.

Under the current system of teacher certification, we routinely exclude people of talent. If the Commission's proposal is adopted, we will certify even more people of low ability and exclude even more people of talent.

Under the current system of teacher compensation, teacher salaries are based on the numbers of degrees compiled and on the number of years of seniority. That is, we reward credentials rather than performance. We do this despite the fact that there is no statistical relationship between credentials and performance. If the Commission's proposal is adopted, even more emphasis will be placed on credentials and less will be placed on performance.

1. Recommendations of the Commission on Standards for the Teaching Profession. Submitted to the State Board of Education on January 14, 1984.

If the Commission's proposal is adopted, more potentially good teachers will avoid the teaching profession, more of the very best practicing teachers will leave the profession, and the academic performance of Texas school children will continue to decline rather than improve.

WHILE CALIFORNIA LEADS THE NATION....

The State of California recently adopted a novel approach to teacher certification. Under the new California plan, college graduates can become certified high school teachers even if they have not taken the college education courses traditionally required. Certification can be had by (1) passing a basic skills exam, (2) passing an exam in the subjects to be taught, and (3) completing a one year teaching internship.

The plan makes a great deal of sense at a time when there is a growing teacher shortage, which is especially acute in mathematics and the sciences. By allowing college students to major in their area of interest (math, physics, etc.) rather than education, the California plan provides a way of skirting the educational bureaucracy. In other states, individuals who lack the required number of education courses are allowed to teach only by obtaining "emergency certificates."

A plan similar to California's has been proposed in New Jersey by Governor Thomas Kean. Arizona, and South Carolina also are considering similar proposals. And, the Council of Chief State School Officers, a national group, has endorsed the idea in principle.

....TEXAS MAY GO IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION

Unfortunately, the proposal put forth by the Commission on Standards for the Teaching Profession, if adopted, would go against the national trend, and move Texas in the opposite direction--by making it more difficult for potentially good teachers to enter the profession. The salient features of this proposal are as follows:

- It would require additional teacher education courses in colleges granting an education degree. These courses would be taken at the expense of courses in the subjects to be taught.
- It would make it more difficult for anyone other than professors with master's and doctorate degrees in education to teach in departments of education.
- It would make departments of education more independent of the colleges and universities where they are located, and more responsive to the Texas Education Agency.

- The current policy of issuing temporary emergency certificates to allow a master's or doctorate degree holder to teach in the public schools would be greatly limited or virtually eliminated until the individual has completed teacher education courses.
- Efforts to bring into the classroom industry-employed, degreed specialists in chemistry, physics and mathematics essentially would be prohibited.

We will discuss these features of the proposal in the context of four major problems confronting the teaching profession.

THE PROBLEM OF TEACHER SHORTAGES

A major problem in the teaching profession is that the number of education graduates who enter teaching each year has fallen below the number of available teaching positions schools are attempting to fill. The difference in these two magnitudes is the "teacher shortage." Projections are that the shortage will continue to grow throughout the 1980s for the nation as a whole.²

- The number of education graduates has dropped by 40 percent over the last decade.
- By 1985, there will be 46,000 more teaching positions available than the number of education graduates entering the profession.
- By 1990, there will be almost 60,000 more teaching positions available than the number of education graduates entering the market.

The problem in Texas reflects the condition of the nation as a whole.³ In Texas, the number of new education graduates has dropped by 50 percent since 1974, and the number of emergency teaching permits now equals the number of education graduates who apply to teach each year.

Shortages of teachers in mathematics and science already are particularly severe in Texas as well as throughout the country. The National Commission on Excellence in Education reported that:⁴

2. Data obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics.
3. "American Education: The ABC's of Failure," Special report of the Dallas Times Herald, December 11-21, 1983; p. 65.
4. National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, p. 23.

- A 1981 survey of 45 states revealed that 43 had shortages of mathematics teachers, 33 had shortages of earth sciences teachers, and all had shortages of physics teachers.
- Half of the newly employed mathematics and science teachers were not qualified to teach these subjects.

The National Commission suggested a solution to this problem which also goes in the opposite direction of the recommendations of the Texas Commission on Standards. The National Commission's report says:

"Substantial nonschool personnel resources should be employed to help solve the immediate problem of the shortage of mathematics and science teachers. Qualified individuals including recent graduates with mathematics and science degrees, graduate students, and industrial and retired scientists could, with appropriate preparation, immediately begin teaching in these fields."⁵

THE PROBLEM OF TEACHER COMPETENCE

In her recent report for the Carnegie Foundation, Emily Feistritzer wrote:

"Never before in the nation's history has the caliber of those entering the teaching profession been as low as it is today...Teaching, clearly, is not attracting America's best minds."⁶

That judgement is confirmed by SAT test scores for collegebound students:⁷

- In 1982, students planning to major in education scored 80 points below the national average in math and verbal skills.
- Out of 29 academic areas, students planning to major in education ranked 26th in terms of SAT scores-- surpassing only those students who planned to major in home economics, ethnic studies and trade and vocational studies.

5. A Nation at Risk, p. 31.

6. C. Emily Feistritzer, The Condition of Teaching: A State by State Analysis, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

7. Data obtained from the College Entrance Examination Board.

Additional evidence that teacher competence is a widespread national problem is found in reports of exceptionally high failure rates by teachers and prospective teachers on competency exams.⁸ The problem appears to be especially acute in Texas:⁹

- Thirty-eight percent of juniors in Texas teacher education programs failed a basic skills test last year involving skills such as calculating percentages, capitalizing words and comprehending a 200-word passage.
- When the same test was given to Houston school teachers, 62 percent--almost two-thirds--failed the exam.

Evidence of teacher incompetence also is furnished by the evaluation of teachers by their peers and supervisors:¹⁰

- A majority of Dallas school teachers responding to a poll said that at least one-fourth of their colleagues were "incompetent."
- More than one-third of the superintendents in the 50 largest school systems in Texas said that about one-fourth of the teachers in their systems were "incompetent."

THE PROBLEM OF TEACHER EDUCATION

In the United States today there are approximately 1,350 institutions with accredited teacher education programs. In an important way, these programs stand at the crux of what is wrong with the current system of teacher certification.

Part of the problem lies in the fact that there is an inevitable trade-off between time spent in education courses and time spent in the subject areas in which the future teacher plans to teach. Hours spent in teacher education courses are hours not spent learning mathematics, English or other subjects.

8. See "What's Wrong With Our Teachers," U.S. News and World Report, March 14, 1983, pp. 37-40.

9. "American Education", p. 61.

10. "American Education", p. 61.

In principle, both sides of the trade should be important. A good teacher needs to know about the subject matter to be taught as well as how to teach. But the National Commission on Excellence in Education judged that the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of "education methods courses" at the expense of courses in the subjects to be taught. The Commission lamented the fact that for elementary school teacher candidates, on the average about 41 percent of their course load is devoted to education courses.¹¹

A second part of the problem is that it is not clear whether valuable information is gained or what valuable skills are learned in the many hours spent in teacher education courses. The unfortunate fact is that the best and brightest college students find most teacher education courses unchallenging, uninteresting and of questionable value to a teaching career.

Stanford's Dean of Education, J. Myron Atkin, has said that there are no more than two dozen teacher education programs in the entire country "that a bright youngster would find demanding." The outspoken H. Ross Perot has said that the best students will not "go to the schools of education and take Mickey Mouse courses. Nobody will sign up for teacher education (because) the schools are so bad."¹²

Perhaps the most revealing confirmation of the questionable value of teacher education programs comes from those who teach in the programs. The new certification program initiated in California is finding its strongest opposition among the professors of education. Apparently, they are worried that if prospective teachers are not required to take courses in education methods, they will not take them at all. The implicit premise in their position is: prospective teachers do not view such courses as a valuable aid to their careers.¹³

The implicit premise may be correct. In Texas, polls of teachers and their supervisors indicate a widespread contempt for most teacher education programs.¹⁴

11. A Nation at Risk, p. 22.

12. "American Education," p. 68.

13. See Virginia Inman, "Certification of Teachers Lacking Courses in Education Stirs Battles in Several States," Wall Street Journal, January 6, 1984; and Charlie Euchner, "N.J. Gov. Offers Plan to Waive Education Courses for Teachers," Education Week, Vol III, No. 2, September 14, 1983.

14. "American Education," p. 68.

- In a poll of Dallas teachers, about one-third gave their teacher training a D or an F.
- In a poll of the superintendents of the 50 largest school systems in Texas, 39 percent graded teacher colleges as poor or failing.

Since the days of Adam Smith, economists have known that competition meets the needs of consumers much better than does monopoly. A future teacher entering college is a potential "consumer" of courses offered by various departments. Given the freedom to choose, the student has an incentive to select that combination of education courses and subject matter courses which best prepares him or her for a career. Under the present system, however, prospective teachers are given little freedom of choice in the academic curriculum. The current system has all of the characteristics of monopoly. Because future teachers are required to enroll in education courses, departments of education have a captive market. They do not need to strive to improve the quality of their product in order to survive in the marketplace. The State Board of Education insures their survival by law. In such an environment there is small wonder that, as one researcher reports, "There is zero correlation between the research on effective teaching and teacher education programs."¹⁵

By contrast, in the presence of freedom of choice on the part of students, departments offering courses would find that they are in competition with one another. The education department, for example, would find that if it wants to attract more students to its courses it would have to upgrade and enhance their value relative to other courses offered in the university. Free and open competition of this sort would be the quickest and severest method of radically improving teacher education programs in this country.

THE PROBLEM OF TEACHER COMPENSATION

As we noted at the outset of this report, public school teachers are compensated on the basis of their credentials and not on the basis of their performance. Teachers are paid on the basis of the number of degrees they have compiled and seniority, not on the basis of how well they teach.

Public school teachers have responded to these incentives in a predictable way. They have spent more time, energy and money obtaining additional academic degrees and (one would suppose) less time, energy and money improving their effectiveness as teachers.

15. David C. Berliner, *Teacher Education Reports*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January 20, 1984.

- Over the last two decades the percentage of high school teachers who hold a master's degree has increased more than 83 percent--from 30 percent to 55 percent of all high school teachers.¹⁶
- Over the same period of time, SAT math scores fell by 28 points and SAT verbal scores fell by 52 points.¹⁷

It might be assumed that there is a relationship between the number of degrees or the number of years of seniority and skill as a teacher. In other words, do more credentials make better teachers? The answer is no. Careful studies have shown that there is no relationship between the credentials that teachers get paid for possessing and teaching ability, as measured by student achievement scores.¹⁸ Moreover, those variables that do seem to influence a teacher's abilities in the classroom (e.g. intellectual skills as measured by a verbal ability test) are not highly correlated with education degrees or with seniority.

The fact that teachers are not paid on the basis of their ability may help explain why so many good teachers either leave the public school system or leave the teaching profession altogether. Each year about 11,000 teachers in Texas leave the public school system.¹⁹ And, if the situation in Texas parallels the experience of other states, those teachers who leave are also the ones who score highest on tests of academic ability.²⁰ In other words, precisely because we reward credentials and not performance, those who are able to perform well leave the system either out of frustration or because they have the ability to earn higher salaries in other professions.

16. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1982-83, pp. 152, Table #246. Data taken from National Education Association Publication. Status of the American Public School Teacher, 1965-66, 1970-71, 1975-76, and 1980-81.
17. Data obtained from the College Entrance Examination Board.
18. Eric Hanushek, "Teacher Characteristics and Gains in Student Achievement: Estimation Using Micro Data," American Economic Review, 61, May, 1971; see also A.A. Summers and B.L. Wolfe, "Do Schools Make a Difference?" American Economic Review, 67, September, 1977, pp. 634-652 and D.R. Winkler, "Educational Achievement and School Peer Group Composition," Journal of Human Resources, 10, Spring, 1975, pp. 189-204.
19. "American Education," p. 65.
20. See Philip C. Schlechty and Victor S. Vance. "Do Academically Able Teachers Leave Education? The North Carolina Case," Phi Delta Kappan 63, October, 1981, pp. 106-112.